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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002319

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS; BRUSSELS
FOR LERNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2017

TAGS: KWBG ECON PHUM IS PREL

SUBJECT: SURVEY OF WEST BANK ROAD OBSTACLES: SOME
DISMANTLED, SOME STILL IN PLACE, MOST INSIGNIFICANT

REF: TEL AVIV 3184

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: ConGen officers visited 21 of 23 West Bank
obstacles to movement that the Israeli Ministry of Defense
(MoD) identified as recently dismantled (reftel) on November

¶2. While the removal of some will facilitate local movement,
the overall impact of this step will not significantly
improve general Palestinian movement. Local residents were
unaware of the existence of some of the obstacles, and most
of the obstacles were not included in the UN's tally of West
Bank obstacles. One large earth mound blocking a paved main
road, that we understand the MoD claims to have removed, is
still in place. End summary.

¶12. (C) On November 2, ConGen Pol and Econ Officers visited
21 of 23 obstacles identified by the Israeli MoD as recently
dismantled on a map provided to Embassy Tel Aviv. Some were
easily found. Others could not be located with certainty
because the map is ambiguous about precise locations and/or
they are small, minor obstacles to movement. ConGen Officers
tried to reconcile the Israeli map sites with a related list
of 24 obstacles obtained from the UN Office for the
Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on November 1,
following OCHA's discussions with Israeli officials. OCHA
officials admit that their list contains a number of
ambiguities, attributing them to imprecise information from
the GoI.

¶13. (C) Six of the obstacles that were removed will
facilitate local movement: Al-Ramadin checkpoint, a partial
checkpoint near Tegoa (though the infrastructure remains),
Aqraba gate/checkpoint, a road barrier near Yatma, and two
earth mounds near Tulkarm. (Note: Some of these were removed
prior to 2007 or by the Palestinians themselves, according to
UN OCHA and local residents. End note).

¶14. (C) The removal of the other 17 obstacles either was not
carried out or was not meaningful. One large earth barrier
blocking a paved road near Tene settlement remains in place.
Sixteen others did not significantly impede movement --
several were not even known to local residents -- and have
not been included in OCHA's count of over 560 West Bank road
obstacles. Brief descriptions of the 21 sites visited are
included below (where possible with their corresponding
number on OCHA's list, as provided to NEA/IPA).

¶15. (C) Begin list of visited obstacle sites:

Southern West Bank: Checkpoint Gone, Mound Remains

i) Ar-Ramadin Checkpoint: The checkpoint is dismantled and no infrastructure remains. The removal improves access for at least 4,000 Palestinian villagers in the Ar-Ramadin area to larger nearby towns. (OCHA list number 22. Included in OCHA obstacle count.)

ii) Tene Settlement: A large earth mound still blocks the main paved road near the Israeli settlement of Tene leading to al-Dhahiriya. ConGenOffs observed Palestinians drive to the barrier, exit their vehicles and walk over the mound to transportation on the other side. (OCHA list number 23. Included in OCHA obstacle count.)

iii) Ten earth mounds along Route 325: No significant earth mounds appear to have been in place except for mounds that blocked dirt trails leading up hilltops. A few dirt roads leading off Route 325 to small Bedouin villages are open. According to OCHA, one mound blocking entrance to a quarry was removed more than a year ago. (OCHA list numbers 11-21 (a discrepancy of one). Not included in OCHA obstacle count.)

Central West Bank: Checkpoint No Longer Manned

iv) A partial checkpoint near Teqoa and the Herodium (denoted on map with large broken circle around the area): Infrastructure for the checkpoint is still in place, but the checkpoint was unmanned when observed at 1230 on November 2. According to OCHA, the IDF still occasionally occupies this checkpoint. When the checkpoint is unmanned, traffic flow is unimpeded along Route 356, a major north-south artery. (Does not appear on the OCHA list, but is included in the OCHA obstacle count as a partial checkpoint.)

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Northern West Bank: Open Gate, Irrelevant Mounds

v) Aqraba Gate/Checkpoint (near Migdalim): The gate blocking access from Palestinian towns of Majdal Bani Fadil and Aqraba to Route 505, a major east-west artery, was open when observed at 1400 on November 2. Checkpoint infrastructure next to the gate was dismantled. According to OCHA, a new partial checkpoint was constructed further up the road to Aqraba. (OCHA list number 9. Included in OCHA obstacle count.)

vi) Yatma (north of the Rechelim settlement): Large stones and a mound blocking access to Route 505 from the Palestinian town of Yatma were removed. According to local residents, the removal occurred more than one year ago. (Note: It is difficult to tell from the MOD map whether this is the obstacle denoted.) (OCHA list number 10. Not included in OCHA obstacle count.)

vii) Three earth mounds on secondary roads between Qabalan and Jurish: No evidence of obstacles, past or present, was found. According to local residents, the roads between Qabalan and Jurish were never blocked, and they did not know of any other nearby obstacles (or recently removed obstacles). (OCHA list numbers 6-8. Not included in OCHA obstacle count.)

viii) Earth mound in Huwwara: An earth mound blocking a short side road to a local school was removed. The mound may have been intended to prevent circumvention of nearby checkpoints, but had no significance for broader traffic flow in the area. (OCHA list number 3. Not included in OCHA obstacle count.)

ix) Earth mounds near Jit Junction: An earth mound blocking a cross-country dirt track from Route 60 south of Jit Junction was removed. The track was used to bypass Jit checkpoint, which is no longer manned full time. (OCHA list

number 4. Recently removed from OCHA obstacle count.) ConGenOffs were unable to locate evidence of a second removed earth mound north of Jit Junction. (OCHA list number 5. Not included in OCHA obstacle count.)

x) Tulkarm area: ConGen Officers were unable to reach two other earth mounds in the Tulkarm area -- one near the village of 'Isbat Abu Khameish and one near Deir al Ghusunin.

OCHA confirms the two have been removed (one by a Palestinian contractor paving the road). Their removal improves access among local villages and to the area's agricultural land. (OCHA list numbers 1 and 2. Possibly included in OCHA obstacle count, depending on precise location.)

Note: OCHA's list of 24 includes an earth mound in the Bethlehem area (number 24) that does not appear on the GOI map. End note.

WALLES